

February 1, 2011

The Honorable Guillermo “Bill” Vidal
Mayor, City and County of Denver
And All Denver Mayoral Candidates

Dear Mayor Vidal and Mayoral Candidates:

For many years, the process of securing entitlements, site plan review approvals and managing permits and inspections through a certificate of occupancy within the City and County of Denver (the “City”) has been frustrating and time consuming. Many efforts have been made by both City and private sector leaders to find solutions to this complex systems challenge, with the goal of creating a faster, simpler and more predictable review process for projects at any scale; but until recently the results from these efforts fell short.

Within the last few years, core issues and structural challenges have been identified, and significant process and cultural improvements have been implemented, that have indeed “cracked the code” of our development review processes. The improvements experienced by all of us in the last year or two have been dramatic, resulting in significant economic benefits for the city. Given our current economic struggles, the continued success and implementation of these proven, improved development review processes are crucial to the economic recovery of our city.

Below is a recap of the key development review process accomplishments that we want to highlight along with some important next steps on which to focus in the near future:

What has been accomplished to date?

- 1. An improved culture:** Department managers and staff throughout many City departments have created and fostered a much-improved sense of customer service and collaboration. From staff at the counters to senior members of management, this cultural shift has taken hold after years of determined effort by the Hickenlooper administration.
- 2. From the top down:** Mayor Hickenlooper campaigned on improving the development review process and creating more predictability. From the start, department managers within Community Planning and Development (CPD), Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Fire, Excise and License, and the Office of Economic Development (OED) have been leading the cultural shift by example. However, without the structural and process changes necessary to support this value system their efforts were limited. In order to provide a common structure upon which this new culture could thrive, the Mayor established the Development Services office, and provided it with centralized and over arching authority. The authority provided Development Services, backed up forcefully by the Mayor’s office, has been the critical element in the success of the development review reform process and will need to be continued to ensure the continued effectiveness of the process.

3. Project Coordinators: For years, there have been efforts to create a centralized single point of contact for users of City services during the development review process. With the creation of Development Services, and the implementation, selection and training of a talented group of Project Coordinators, this approach has also found its footing. The Project Coordinators allow users, particularly first time users, to have a “virtual expeditor” helping to make connections, foster communication and advocate for applicants and submittals as they move through the process. The impression from the user is a very positive one, with the end result a more pleasant, less intimidating experience for applicants and a faster, more predictable timeline. All of this is based on a belief system that values the users, the city’s clientele - an important message for the City to be communicating to the marketplace.

4. Issue resolution meetings: Issue resolution meetings are an effective innovation that cuts through “red tape” and reduces the time required for multiple parties to weigh in on a question that affects multiple agencies and/or their priorities that can otherwise result in contradictory directions given to a user. Again, the City’s foundation of collaboration is critical to this team approach of solving an issue, or a series of issues, that would otherwise have taken weeks or months to resolve in a less effective series of one on one interactions.

5. Technology: The City has implemented a number of new technologies that enable electronic (“eplan”) submittal and payment (“e-pay”) processes. Free Wi-Fi is now available on the first and second floors of the Webb building. In addition, there is now a Development Services website, which will enable online permitting.

6. The glue that “holds it all together”: Development Services is the first fully-functional and effective embodiment of an independent leader/liaison with the authority to set deadlines and protect the integrity and predictability of the process for users. Development Services has been invaluable in shortening timelines and fostering predictability for application processes.

Next steps:

- 1. Existing buildings:** While the current processes have provided significant improvements in the review of new structures, improvement is still needed in the area of adaptive re-use and remodel work. Successful review and approval of complex adaptive re-use and renovation projects require judgment and compromise in order to make the rehabilitation of existing buildings viable. This is particularly important now as rehabilitation projects currently comprise the majority of construction permits and will likely continue to do so in the near future.
- 2. Inspection issues:** There is more collaboration and communication needed between plan check and building inspection. Often, projects are required to provide changes and revisions during the construction inspection process that were not caught during the plan check process. While this is inevitable to some extent - and while we understand that life safety issues are paramount - contractors, developers and architects are often caught in an uncomfortable position of not wanting to go over the inspector’s head, while still needing to get an issue resolved. We suggest that there needs to be a safe forum for the

discussion of these issues as they occur, as well as the possibility of incorporating other approaches that reduce conflicts, costs and time delays during construction.

3. **Technology:** While we appreciate many of the improvements integrating technology into city processes, there is still room for improvement in truly moving towards e-commerce. What else can be done from a computer? Plan submittals? Final Mylars in electronic form?
4. **Greater collaboration:** Further collaboration with other related agencies within the city is needed. Great strides, and commitments to further efforts are in place, with CPD, Public Works, Parks and OED, but we need the same relationships, culture and types of processes with non-City entities including Denver Water, Xcel, Comcast and Metro Wastewater.
5. **Coordination with International Codes.** Another item in need of continued improvement is the process for adopting the International Fire and Building Codes and making local amendments. The building owner and development community must be an intrinsic part of the code review and adoption cycle and the long-time goal to reduce local “custom” amendments in Denver should be followed, except for critical amendments with thorough justification and a demonstrated cost analysis. Through minimizing costly and custom amendments in Denver and following the intent of the international codes, the building owner and development community will find it easier and more practical to locate and “do business” in Denver—something we all want.

As our expectations for our public realm evolve, and competition from other urban environments increases, we must continue to strive for a process that produces predictability and the highest and best design solutions. These priorities do not contradict each other; in fact, when a fully integrated process is implemented, the results are an improved experience for the user an improved final product, and a payback which exceeds the investment, both economically and experientially. Development Services, together with the culture that has been embodied within Development Services, and the results they have created to date prove the value of the systems created.

We ask now that you, as Mayor of Denver, help insure the longevity of both the Development Services approach and the important and effective innovations mentioned above by committing to the issuance of an executive order or equivalent policy document. We believe that this document should not only enumerate the important procedures to be retained but also identify a clear process that can be implemented in the future to continue the positive momentum the current and previous administrations have achieved to date. If appropriate, we would be happy to form an advisory group from the private sector as an ongoing mechanism to help insure that the great progress made so far is sustained.

Moving forward into a new administration, it will be critical to communicate these values to the City’s users and clients. We look forward to clear positions and visions from mayoral candidates that support the continuation and improvement of the Development Services approach, and then

actions such as those listed above from the new mayoral administration to implement this continued collaborative vision.

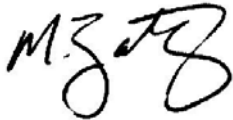
Sincerely,



Brad Buchanan, Chair
Downtown Denver Partnership, Inc.



Kitty Yuen, President
American Institute of Architects,
Denver Chapter



Mitch Zatz
President
Denver Metropolitan Commercial
Association of REALTORS®



Michael Gifford, Executive Director
Associated General Contractors of Colorado



Marshall Burton, President
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Jeannie Bernard, CAE
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Cc: All members of Denver City Council
All declared Denver City Council candidates
Peter Park, Manager, Community Planning and Development
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